

The Politics of Ethnicity, Unity and the Historic Past in *Yäburqa Zimäta*, *Dertogada* and *Ramatohara*: From New Historical and CDA Perspectives

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Abstract

This article examines the politics of ethnicity, unity, and the historic past in three Amharic novels: *Yäburqa Zimäta* (2000) by Tesfaye Gebreab, and *Dertogada* (2009) and *Ramatohara* (2010) by Yismaeke Worku. The objective is to analyze and interpret the differences in how these novels represent these themes. The analysis is conducted through the perspectives of New Historicism and Critical Discourse Analysis, as both approaches consider the political, historical, and cultural contexts in which the literary texts are produced and consumed, as well as the interconnectedness of systems. The findings of the analysis reveal that these contemporary Amharic novels reflect the prominent political issues of ethnicity, unity, and the historic past. However, their representations of these themes are not uniform. In *Yäburqa Zimäta* (2000), the question of nationality is addressed after acknowledging the rights of ethnic groups to self-determination. In contrast, the other two novels advocate for unity through development. Additionally, the latter two novels valorize Emperor Tewodros and Emperor Menelik II as symbols of the country, while the former condemns Emperor Menelik II as a colonizer of the Oromo people. These differences in representation indicate that the novels reflect the diverse political ideas and perspectives of the time. Furthermore, as the novels are influenced by the prevailing political ideologies, they also have the potential to shape contemporary politics. Ultimately, the examination of these selected books confirms the reciprocal relationship between politics and literature in the relevant society. In addition to providing enjoyment, the novels serve as platforms for social and political dialogue.

Key words: New Historicism, Critical Discourse Analysis, Ethnicity, Unity, Historic Past, Representation

Introduction

Dertogada (2009) and *Ramatohara* (2010) are the first two series (among the five) novels by Yismaeke Worku, while *Yäburqa Zimäta* (2000) is a novel by Tesfaye Gebreab. All the three novels are published under the EPRDF political period. The novels are political though their focuses vary. Tesfaye's *Yäburqa Zimäta* dealt mainly with ethnic politics specifically Oromo nationalism, while the two novels of Yismaeke dealt with the need for calling Ethiopian Diaspora scientists and elites to their

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motherland to work for the country in research and science so that they should engage in bringing about stable development and unity for Ethiopia that cannot be devalued whenever a change in governments made. In dealing with these points, all the three contemporary novels depict issues of ethnicity, unity and the historic past, though they treat the themes differently. The researcher was motivated to focus on these topics by the disparities in how these modern novels represented them. Put another way, the novels were chosen specifically because they are well-suited to address the representation of political themes related to ethnicity, unity, and comparative history.

The general objective of the study was to examine the politics of ethnicity, unity, and the historic past in *Yäburqa Zimäta*, *Dertogada*, and *Ramatohara* from new historical and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) perspectives. The specific objectives are:

1. To analyze the historical narratives and discourses surrounding ethnicity, unity, and the historic past in *Yäburqa Zimäta*, *Dertogada*, and *Ramatohara*, with a focus on understanding how these narratives shape political ideologies and power dynamics.
2. To investigate the role of language, symbolism, and cultural heritage in the construction and negotiation of ethnic identities and notions of unity in the three contexts, and to explore how these factors contribute to or challenge existing power structures.

New Historicism and Critical Discourse Analysis critical approaches are interested in the political, historical and cultural backgrounds in which literary texts are produced, as well as in the inter-relatedness of systems because such circumstances help in understanding and interpreting literary texts.

New Historicism does not accept the idea of the interpretation of literary texts independently. It acknowledges context and history as the most important factors in the production and interpretation of literary texts. For New Historicists, literature and history, literature and context, are inseparable. As Payne (2005, p. 3), states, "... the relationship between literature and history is a high priority for new historicists". As literature is shaped by history and context, it in turn shapes history and context. Brannigan (2001, p. 170) states that literature "does not behave passively towards history; it does not, in other words, reflect history as a mirror. Literature shapes and constitutes historical change. Literary texts can have effects on the course of history, on the social and political ideas and beliefs of their time".

For New Historicists literature is related to culture; literature is not only a mirror of culture; it shapes and improvises the culture (Abrams, 1999, p. 183; Baldick, 2001, p. 171; Mikics, 2007, p. 205). As Greenblatt (2005, p. 15) while discussing culture states, novels “do not merely passively reflect the prevailing ratio of mobility and constraint; they help to shape, articulate, and reproduce it through their own improvisatory intelligence.”

For New Historicists, literature is also very much associated to politics; literature is not only a mirror of politics but a means for politics; literature has the power to reflect, represent, and shape the politics of the time in which it was produced; it is a state machine to control the society, and at the same time a means to change the politics of the state. It is a field of political struggle between the different forces of society and institutions (Brannigan, 2001).

The New Historicist critical approach is therefore very appropriate to this study which deals with the representation of the politics of ethnicity, unity and the historic past in the aforestated three Amharic novels because it enables the researcher to study the novels in relation to the political period in which they are produced.

The second theoretical critical approach employed in this research is Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Like New Historicists, most Critical Discourse Analysis theorists are interested in power relations. Power is a key element in the discussion of discourse. Relationships of dominance, discrimination between different classes, races, members of institutions, and gender are some of the most dominant issues in which most Critical Discourse Analytical approaches are interested. Furthermore, the concepts of Critical Discourse Analysis, such as order of discourse and power, are related to the concepts of New Historicism.

Most importantly, Critical Discourse Analysis can fruitfully be applied in the study of literature. Literary works are considered as utterances, institutions, cultural artifacts, meanings and social practices. As MacDonnell states, “The methods and concepts of recent study of discourse make possible analysis of the discourses, in their relation to institutional practices, through which a division of texts has been marked out and literature has been constituted as the object of a certain enshrinement.” (Cited in Mills, 1997, p.23). Since literature is discourse, it is possible to study politics, gender, sex, femininity, race, and power-relations in literary texts alongside other works such as history,

autobiography, and cultural and political texts by means of Critical Discourse Analysis (Mills, 1997, p. 23).

Critical Discourse Analysis has been discussed by writers such as Fairclough, 1995, Wodak and Mayer, 2001 and 2002. These authorities share common features in that it is possible to categorize them as belonging to the same movement. For instance, they believe that social and cultural processes and structures are partly linguistic-discursive in character. They also believe that discourse constitutes the social world and is also constituted by other social practices. They analyze language empirically within its social context. They believe that discourse has ideological functions. Critical Discourse Analysis has the political commitment to social change (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997 as cited in Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002, pp. 60 - 64). But there are significant differences between the Critical Discourse Analysis approaches with respect to their theoretical understanding of power, ideology and methods for the empirical study of language use in social interaction and its ideological effects (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002, p.64).

In this study, Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis method is selected as one tool for analyzing and interpreting the novels and the contexts in which they were written. However, since there are non-discursive practices that have to be analysed, in addition to CDA, other social and cultural theories have been used to make the analysis complete. Social and cultural theories are therefore necessary in addition to Critical Discourse Analysis (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002). Therefore, in this research, Critical Discourse Analysis is used together with New Historicism. The approaches will help the researcher to investigate the novels in relation to the culture, history, power relationships and the overall systemic situation in which they were written. This is consistent with Jackson's (1991, p. 268) assertion that "literature exists and finds a meaning only within human cultures; and the human cultures are themselves historically constructed."

Ethnicity commonly refers to relationships of racial, cultural and historical characteristics by which human groups are sometimes divided into separate political families, sometimes antagonistic. They are usually divided on language and religion bases. Ethnic politics is important in third world countries because ethnicity concerns the whole socio-political question of national identity (Robertson, 2004).

Ethiopia is a third world country of multi-ethnic society where the Amharas, the Oromos, the Somalis and the Tigrins are some of the

largest ethnic groups. The different ethnic societies were ruled under a central government during the past two governments of the Emperor Haile Selassie I and the Darg. During these periods some political elites and political groups felt that the ruling class is mostly the Amharas and there were problems of domination and inequality among the different ethnic groups. There were also political groups who fought for democracy, ethnic equality and/or secession. The Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) promoted ethnic politics even before the constitution was approved in August 1995. Ethnic political parties were encouraged as far as they accepted the politics of the EPRDF. In this respect, it seems natural for literary texts to draw on or reflect important socio-political issues of the country, such as the politics of ethnicity, national unity and the historic past.

The Politics of Ethnicity, Unity and the Historic Past in *Yäburqa Zimīta*

A number of ethnic-based conflicts were observed in reality in some parts of the country, especially in Oromia region. For example, there were ethnic conflicts between the Oromo and the Amhara people in the former provinces of Hararghe, Bale and Arsi (Wondwoson, 2008, p. 6; 2009, p. 63). Some political organizations such as the Oromo People's Democratic Organization (OPDO), Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and the All Amhara People's Organization (AAPO) have condemned each other for the cause and aggravation of the problem. The novel, *Yäburqa Zimīta*, deals extensively with this ethnic politics. For instance, as recounted in the story, several conflicts occurred in Arsi and the blame made between the Oromo and the Amhara fronts regarding the cause of the conflicts are summarized by the narrator as shown in the two extracts given below:

ከቡርቃ ግጭት በሁዋላ በተለያዩ የአርሲ አካባቢዎች በኦሮሞና በአማራ ገበሬዎች መካከል መጠነ ሰፊ ግጭቶች ይከሰቱ ጀመር። ቃጠሎው ደም መፋሰሱ ወደ ሳጉራ - ጉና - አርባ ጉጉ - በቆጂ - ጎሮ - አገልጆ - ጃራ - ተዛመተ። የመከላከያ ሰራዊት ግጭቶችን ለማስወገድ ከወዲያ ወዲህ መወርወር ዋነኛ ስራው ሆነ። አርሲ በርግጥም የእሳት እቶን ሆነች። (ተስፋዮ፣ 2000, ገጽ 390 – 391)

Several conflicts were observed in different Arsi districts between the Amhara and the Oromo peasants soon after the conflict of Burqa. This bloody conflict expanded far to Sagure – Arba Gugu – Beqoji – Goro – Ageljo – Jara. The Army was busy in stopping the conflicts at different

places. Surely Arsi became the center of the bloody ethnic conflict (Tesfaye, 2000, pp. 390 – 391)

ኢህአዴግ በሁለቱ ብሄሮች መካከል የቆየ መሻከር ቢኖርም ለግጭቱ በዚህ መልኩ መከሰት የአነግ እጅ አለበት ሲል ገለጸ። ... መአህድ በበኩሉ ግጭቱን ያስነሳው የኢህአዴግ የጎሳ ፖሊሲና የአነግ ዘረኝነት ነው ሲል መግለጫ አወጣ። በመግለጫውም በአርሲ የሚኖሩ የአማራና የኦሮሞ ገበሬዎች ላለፉት መቶ አመታት እጅና ጉዋንት ሆነው በፍቅር ኖረዋል። አሁን በተነሳው ጠብም ዋነኛ ተጠቂ አማራው ነው ሲል እራታውን አሰማ።

አህዴድ ደግሞ የአማራውም ሆነ የኦሮሞው ጉዳት እኩል ነው የሚሰማን ሲል መግለጫ አወጣ፤ ምክንያቱ በሁለቱም ወገን የተጎዱት ጭቆናችን ጉዳዮች ናቸው። ...በአማራው ላይ ብቻ ጭፍጨፋ ተፈጽሟል ብሎ መአህድ ሚያቀርበውን ግን ፍጹም አንቀበለውም አለ።

አነግ ደግሞ በፊናው ግጭቱን እኔ አልቀሰቀስኩም። ጠመንጃ አላደልኩም። የኦሮሞ ህዝብ ብሶት በራሱ ሃይል ፈንድቷል። ከእንግዲህ ደግሞ መቆሚያ ላይኖረው ይችላል ሲል አስጠነቀቀ (ተስፋየ፣ 2000, ገጽ 392 – 393)።

The EPRDF declared that though the hostility between the Oromo and the Amhara people was not new, it was the OLF which was responsible for the recent conflict

The AAPO in its turn announced that the reason for the conflict between the Oromo and the Amhara people is the ethnic policy of the EPRDF. In the declaration, the AAPO explained that the Amhara and the Oromo people have so far lived together peacefully in the last century. But the Amhara people become victims of the conflict.

The OPDO in its part declared that they are sorry for the loss of the Amhara and Oromo people equally because on both sides the victims were the poor. ... Nevertheless, we don't accept the critique of AAPO because it was not only the Amhara community who suffered from the conflict.

OLF in its part declared that their organization is not responsible for the conflict. It did not distribute rifles to the people. The anger of the Oromo people exploded by itself. The OLF further warned 'the wrath might not be stopped easily'. (Tesfaye, 2000, pp. 392 – 393).

The fundamental causes of such conflicts between the Amhara and the Oromo people in the novel are usually attributed to one historical event, namely the expansion of Emperor Menilik II. The Oromo nationalist characters and the editorial narrator of the novel make Menelik II responsible for the deprivation of the Oromo people of their land resources. These characters and the narrator repeatedly explained that the Oromo people have been deprived of their basic rights, lands and their

traditions since the expansion of Menelik II to the south. Therefore, most of the conversations and narrations of these characters are specifically targeting the defamation of Emperor Menelik II.

In the novel, *Yäburqa Zimäta*, the ethnic conflict in the Burqa area occurred during the EPRDF government because of the myth told in connection with the River Burqa and the death of the old man, Abba Dula Wako. According to the myth, the River Burqa has begun to flow underground because Menelik II took the land of the Oromo people under his control. Before that time, the River Burqa, like most rivers, had flowed on the surface of the land. However, when the Emperor controlled the area, the river felt ashamed and started to flow in the underground. Then the myth is meant to say that the River Burqa will flow, like in the old good days, on the surface of the earth when the Oromo people administer themselves and be the owner of their land. This will happen when the old man Abba Dula Waqo dies. Now, the time has come. The old man died and the Burqa area Oromo people are ready to expel and dismiss the surrounding Amhara people who are referred to as näfit'äña. The narrator and the Oromo characters further blame Menelik II, as they thought that he was the one who changed their democratic culture like the 'Gäda' system. Thus, the Burqa Oromo people, taking the death of Abba Dula Wako as an opportunity, wait for their mythic leaders, Anoli² and Hawini, so that the Oromo people take the revenge against the Amharas who lived around Burqa for the 'crime' or loss that happened 100 years before. The novel used the myth to instigate the Oromo people to fight against the Amhara, näfit'äña.

In connection to the function of literature in the construction of the identity of a people, Bertens (2001, p.176) writes the following: "just like any other text, literature does not simply reflect relations of power, but actively participates in the consolidation and/or construction of discourses and ideologies, just as it functions as an instrument in the construction of identities, not only at the individual level – that of the subject – but also on the level of the group or even that of the national state". Likewise, the novel *Yäburqa Zimäta* constructs discourses of identity and nationality. The Oromo-born major characters, Hawini and Anoli, promote Oromo tribalism: that the right of the Oromo people to

2 A statue called Anoli has been made in Oromia region, Arsi zone, (also the setting of the novel), in remembrance for the Oromo people (especially mothers) killed during the expansion of Menelik 100 years before. The statue has caused political controversy among the ruling party, EPRDF and the oppositions.

self-determination should be granted; that the Oromo language must be the language of the people in education and the courts; that the people must be the beneficiary of the land and resources of the region; and that the Oromo people must administer themselves. That is what Hawini propagates for the assembly of the Oromo elders (*see pp. 277 – 288 of the novel*).

Sometimes, in the novel the Oromo-born characters are made to push the Oromo people to revenge the Amhara, by telling a provoking story (the myth of the “silence of Burqa” which is embodied by the title of the novel) and giving explanations related to Oromo identity. For example, Hawini refers to the *Dictionary of Amharic* by Kidane Wold Kifle (“አለቃ ኪዳነ ወልድ ባዘጋጁት መዝገበ ቃላት ጋላን ገድሎ ምነው - ገለጫ ማለት ነበር ይላል” (2000, ገጽ 280, literally means “kill the Gala people and boast”³ and to the religious narrative *Raiye Mariam*⁴ (2000, p. 184), while Anoli refers to Abba Bahri the writer of *Zena Galla*, for his explanations of the word ‘Galla’⁵ (2000, p. 151). Such explanations are

³ *Kidanewold Kifle in black and white wrote the meaning of Galla as the name of an Ethnic group that originated from central Africa and who became the enemy of the Amhara people; so that the saying “kill the Galla and boast” originated from this enemy at that moment in the history of the two people. Kidanewold did not write based on his point of view; he rather told the popular saying at that time (however, I think that such kind of writing should not be encouraged). The whole words of the dictionary is stated as follows: ጋላ በቁሙ ልዩነት ያለው ባለመለዩ ሕዝብ ጭፍራ፡፡ ስመ ነገድ ጋሎስ ከሚባል ሕዝብ የወጣ፤ ወይም ከማህል አፍራቃ የመጣ ያማራ ጠላት ደመኛ፡፡ (ተረት)፡፡ በግና ተኩላ ዐማራና ጋላ፤ ጋላን ገድሎ ምነው ጋሌ በማለት ፈንታ ምነው ገለጫ ማለት ከዚህ ከስሙ የወጣ ነው፡፡*

⁴ The characterer Hawini condemns the religious book *Raiye Mariam* (literally means Revelation of St Merry)(1960) its explanation stated as says: «ያንዱ ነፍስ በአንዱ ላይ ሲወድቅ አየሁ፡፡ እኔም ምንድን ናቸው? ብዬ ልጄን (አያሱስን) ጠየቅሁት፡፡ እርሱም አራስ መርገም፤ ደንቆሮ፤ እስላም፤ ጋላ፤ ሻንቅላ፤ ፈላሻ ናቸው፡፡ ፈረስ፤ አህያና ግመልን በወሲብ የሚገናኙ...» [I saw when the spirit of one falling on the other. I requested my son(Jesus) what are these people? He replied to me that they are ‘sinners’, dull, Islam, Gala, Shankila (to mean black people), Felasha (to mean Judah people)፡፡ They have a habit of making sex to horse, donkey and camel. (I have tried to refer to another edition of the book(I could not find the 1960 edition) but I could not prove whether this is real or fictional)

⁵ Anoli in his discussion with Yodit, condemns Aba Bahiri, the author of *Zena Gala* (meaning News about the Gala (Oromo) people) for the negative attitude he showed towards the Oromo people in his introductory paragraph as “ቁጥር፣ ነፍሳትን ለመግደል ያላቸውን አራባጅነትና የጭካኔ መጥፎ ልማዳቸውን ለማሳወቅ <... their habit of killing creatures, and cruelty they had ...

offensive and derogatory not only to the Oromo people but also to any other people. It might not be wrong if the reader raised a question why the author made such references to the century-old books at this time of ethnic political pressure. The author arguably used it for political consumption⁶. Hence, from this situation, it is possible to realize the power of literature in constructing ideology in the people. In connection to this point, the new historicists believe that literature has the power to reveal and shape ideologies and politics in the society (Ngugi, 1981, p. 6 & 73; Bertens, 2001, p. 166 - 167). In other words, a literary text like this could serve "...as a basis for the reconstruction of an ideology" (Belsay, 1980 as cited in Myers, 1998, p. 89).

Anoli, one of the major characters from the Oromos, suspects that it is the Tigrean organization (TPLF) which dominates the EPRDF. As to him, the Oromo organization (OPDO) which is a member of the EPRDF is a puppet Oromo organization founded by the TPLF when TPLF planned to continue the war outside the Tigray region following the surprising victory over the huge army of the Darg government. Therefore, Anoli thought that to get into the Oromia region, TPLF must have a puppet Oromo organization, OPDO; otherwise, the Oromo people could not have welcomed the TPLF and EPRDF. Hence, for Anoli, the OPDO is not a free and independent Oromo organization (2000, p. 301), and the EPRDF is a new *näfit'äña* organization. That is one of the reasons for his agitation of the Oromo people to rebel against and subvert EPRDF. In connection to subversion, Brannigan (2001, p.174) states, "Literature, like other written sources, raises the possibility of subversion against the state." Regarding the need for an independent Oromo organization, Anoli in his dialogue with Kumsa, the real-life leader of OPDO, says (2000, p. 301):

ከማንም ያልተጠጋጋ ከበላዩ የኦሮሞ ሰማይ ብቻ ያለው የኦሮሞ ድርጅት ያስፈልገናል። የሚቆጣ አለቃ ይዘህ እጅህን ይዞ ፖለቲካ ያስተማረህን ከተጣልክበት አንስቶ በህልምህ እንኩዋ የማታስበውን ስልጣን ያጎናጸፈህን የሌላ ብሄር ጌታ ይዘህ እንዴት ነው ስለዴሞክራሲ የምታወራልን?

We need a fully independent Oromo organization with only the Oromo sky above it. How do you tell us about democracy while

6 The author was an official of the EPRDF in the Propaganda section before he went to exile perhaps for he is suspected as infiltrator of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front. The Eritrean People Liberation Front is said to support the Oromo Liberation Front which demands secession from Ethiopia.

you are under the control of an arrogant different ethnic political organization that thought you the abc of politics and brought you to power that you haven't even imagined it?

The OPDO (Kumsa's party) in turn accuses the other Oromo organization, OLF, of its anarchistic and secessionist cause which is also responsible for all the conflicts that took place in the region. Such literary reflections were observed in the real political environment. For instance, the OPDO has made the OLF responsible for the heavy loss of life in the conflicts of the Bedeno and Arba Gugu areas (Wondwoson, 2008, p. 6, 2009, p. 63).

According to the real-life character, Kumsa, the OPDO and OLF do have differences regarding the idea of secession. The OPDO believes that if the Oromo people are autonomous, and have the right to self-determination, and the Oromo people can live with other Ethiopian nationalities in love and with respect. As to the OPDO, secession is not a solution to the problem of the Oromo people. Anoli's position regarding secession does not seem different from that of Kumsa and OPDO. But Anoli believes that as the Oromo people are the largest ethnic group living in the largest part of Ethiopia, they have to secure the leadership of the country. In this regard, both the utterances of Kumsa and the report of the narrator are reproduced respectively in the following paragraphs (2000, p. 304 & 324):

በጉልበት መጠቀም መፍትሄ አለመሆኑን ነው። ከአነግ ጋር ያለን ልዩነትም ይኸው ነው። የኦሮሞ ህዝብ አካባቢውን ማስተዳደር ይጀምራል። የመብቱና የኢኮኖሚው ተጠቃሚ ይሆናል። ባህልና ቋንቋውን ማሳደግ ይጀምራል። ይህ ከሆነ በኛ እምነት ከሌሎች ኢትዮጵያውያን ጋር በጋራ መኖር የማንችልበት ሁኔታ የለም።

የመገንጠል ጥያቄም የኦሮሞ ህዝብ ጥያቄ ከሆነ በህዝብ ውሳኔ ይስተናገድ ባይ ነን። የአነግ መሪዎች ግን ትላንት ነፍጠኛው ያደርግ እንደነገበረው በህዝብ ደም መክበር ነው የሚሹት። በዚህ ክፍተኛ ልዩነት አለን። ... (2000፣ ገጽ 304)።

Power cannot bring a solution. The difference between us and the OLF is on this issue. If the Oromo people begin to administer their region, they will be the beneficiary of the economy. They develop their language and culture. If this becomes a reality, there is no reason not to live together with other ethnic groups. Otherwise, if secession is the question of the Oromo people, we believe that it must get the will of the people.

But the leaders of the OLF want to be rich at the expense of the struggle of our people like what the näfit’äña people did in the past. We have a big difference regarding this issue. ... (2000, p. 304)

አኖሌ የመገንጠል ጥያቄ መፍትሄ ነው ብሎ አያምንም። የመገንጠል ጥያቄ በመብት ደረጃ ከተቀመጠ በቂ ነው ይላል። ኦሮሚያ ከሌላው የኢትዮጵያ ህዝብ ተገንጥሎ የትም ሊሄድ አይችልም የሚል እምነት አለው። ሆኖም የኦሮሞ ህዝብና ምድር ከመላው ኢትዮጵያ ከግማሽ በላይ በመሆኑ ኦሮሞዎች ኢትዮጵያን በበላይነት መምራት ማረጋገጥ ይገባቸውል ባይ ነው።(2000፣ ገጽ 324)

Anoli does not believe that secession is a solution to the problem; however he insists on the inclusion of the article “the right to self-determination up to secession” in the constitution. He asserts that the Oromo people will reach nowhere isolated from other people of Ethiopia. However, since the Oromo people are the largest and their region is the biggest part of all the other groups and regions, the Oromo people must ensure that they administer the country(2000, p. 324).]

On the other hand, Anole claims equality of the Oromo people and wishes respect for each ethnic groups of Ethiopia; on the other hand, he wishes the supremacy of the Oromo people over the other ethnic groups since the Oromo people are the largest population living in the largest size of the country. Therefore, the above explanation of the character seems to be contradictory.

Likewise, the other Oromo-born female character, Hawini, believes that the Oromo people must be autonomous, able to administer themselves and live peacefully with other ethnic groups of Ethiopia. The Oromo people have to learn and be judged by their own language; and this will be realized by working together with the EPRDF (2000, p. 40). As mentioned in the preceding section, Anoli unlike Hawini is suspicious of the EPRDF and its current officials even after he was rescued by TPLF’s guerilla leader Hayelom and got his cooperation to leave for Asmara, (2000, p. 442). This can be understood from the dialogue that Anole makes with the editorial narrator at Asmara, in the epilogue of the novel (2000, p. 456):

የወያኔ የፖለቲካ ሞተሮች እንደ ሃየሎም አያስቡም፤ ... በሀየሎም ይመሩ የነበሩት የአኒያ ቅን ጀግኖች ዘመን አልፏል። የአነርሱ ህልምና እምነት በዛሬው የፖለቲካ መድረክ ውስጥ የለም።

የኦሮሞ ህዝብ ገና ነጻነቱን ባለማግኘቱ በስውር ቅኝ አገዛዝ ስር በመውደቁ በቀጣይ በራሱ መንገድ መታገሉን መቀጠል አለበት። የጆርጅ ኦርዌልን *Animal Farm* በገሀዱ አለም ለማየት መብቃቱ በእጅግ ይደንቀኛል። ኦርዌል ነቢይ ነበር። አንድ ሌላ ሀቅ ደሞ ልንገራችሁ፤ ወደፊት የኦሮሞ ህዝብ መራራ መስዋዕትነት ከፍሎ ነጻነቱን በጁ ማስገባቱ አይቀርም። በዚያን ጊዜ ግን የኦሮሞ ህዝብ ስሜት አደገኛ ነው የሚሆነው። ከባድ የቀል ነበልባል ሊለኩስም ይችላል። ኢትዮጵያውያን ይህ እንዳይፈጸም የሚሹ ከሆነ ከወዲሁ ሊያስቡበት ይገባል። ያ ቀን ከመምጣቱ በፊት በሰላማዊ መንገድ ሙሉ መብቶቻችን ይከበሩልን ዘንድ እንሻለን።

The political cadres of the TPLF do not think like Hayelom. ... the good old days of the goodhearted heroes like Hayelom had already gone. The dreams and beliefs of these people do not exist in today's TPLF political sphere.

The Oromo people should continue their struggle in their own ways as they are indirectly colonized and deprived of their democratic rights. It is a wonder! I have already observed the story of George Orwell in real life. Orwell was really a prophet. Let me tell you another fact. It is inevitable for the Oromo people to get their freedom after they make a bitter struggle. At that time, the Oromo people might be dangerous. They might take revenge. The Ethiopians should think about it beforehand. Therefore, if they don't want this to happen, Ethiopians should let us (Oromo people) enjoy our democratic rights.

As it can be understood from what Anole says an analogy is made between what has happened to the EPRDF and what takes place in George Orwell's *Animal Farm*: "All animals are equal but some animals are more equal than others".

There are other incidents related to the ethnic politics in the novel. For instance, Hawini planned to go to Sudan from Gondar because of ethnic problem (2000, p.124). She was detained for months by the district officials, because she picked a girl, the daughter of a school teacher from one minority ethnic group, in order to welcome the higher officials of the region who came to officially inaugurate the new classrooms buildings. In addition, the intimate friendship that Anoli and Yodit had was broken because of Anoli's fervid sentiment of Oromo tribalism. He decided not to get engaged to her as he thought Yodit's father was a narrow Amhara tribalsit (2000, p.150 - 151). In another context, Roza, the Eritrean nationalist character, is heard saying that Eritrean girls do not get

engaged to men from other ethnic groups in order to keep the race from extinction (2000, p. 203).

The authorial/editorial narrator of the novel seems to be a democrat and sensitive to the issue of equality of ethnic groups; on the other hand, it does not seem to care for characters by using some derogatory words and phrases when describing some ethnic groups, historical figures and writers (2000, pp. 52, 59, 152 & 280 – 285). For instance, the Oromo Character, Anoli in his way driving to Burqa, as the three representatives of the Burqa Oromo elders told him that the prison officials insulted and ridiculed them using a proverb “ሲሉ ሰምታ ዶሮ ታንቃ ሞተች» (“A hen hanged itself pretending others”) described the Amhara people, in the following way) (2000, p. 52):

ለተረትማ ማን ብሏቸው? ኑሮአቸው ተረት ነው። አስተሳሰባቸውም ተረት ነው። እንደባልቴት ተረት ከማውራት የተሻለ ምን ያውቃሉ? ደደቦች! እነሱን ብሎ ደሞ ስልጡን? ለዚህች ሀገር ምን ቁም ነገር የፈየዱ መሰላቸው? ሶስት ሺህ እያሉ የሚመኩበትን ዘመን ሙሉ ጠጅ በመጣልና በመጠጣት ነው ጊዜያቸውን የፈጁት።

[They are very excellent in telling folktales. Their lives are folktales. They know nothing other than telling folktales. Idiots! Who called the Amhara people civilized? What good have they done to this country? They ended the 3000 years by tej making and drinking.]

In fact, Anoli insulted the Amhara people as he was very offended by some officials of the prison, who insulted Abba Boru by using another derogatory phrases like “ጅል ጋላ” (“Stupid/Idiot Galla”), “ከምትነዱዋቸው አህያች አትሻሉም” (“You are not even worse than the donkeys you are “riding”) and “መቼ ይሆን የምትሰለጥኑት” (“When do you behave like a civilized people?”).

The author of *Yäburqa Zimäta* claims that the novel is the first Amharic fiction in which the Oromos are portrayed as major characters (Hunde, 2012). The author further claims that “he was thinking about Lencho Lata while he was framing Anole Waqo as a main character...Lencho an outspoken veteran Oromo politician at the center of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF)”(?).

The question, then, is why does the author claim this and dare to use derogatory words, phrases and sentences in describing the ethnic groups and tell other provocative story as discussed in the previous paragraphs? The author might have a sentiment of Oromo tribalism since he grew up

in Bisheftu, a city located in Oromia region. Besides, as a politician, the writer could have some kind of political reasons, as it can be especially understood from the description given in the novel (2000, p. 461, see the quotation in page 15), and the circulation of the Xerox copy of the novel in black market and his other critique books of the EPRDF available online after he was exiled to Europe. At that time, he was also accused by some people of being an agent of Isaias Afwerki, the former leader of Shabia or Eritrean People Liberation Front (EPLF), the incumbent president of Eritrea (Judge Woldemichael Meshehsa, Ethiomedia. com).

Regarding the manner of representation, some events of the novel, *Yäburqa Zimīta*, and the sentiments of the characters are reflected implicitly and symbolically. For instance, the Oak tree on which the lamp hangs up and the light that the lamp gives to the surrounding area of the Burqa plateau⁷ likely reveal symbolically the hopes of Hawini and the Oromo people, as can be understood from the description of the narrator (2000, p. 438): “በጨለማው ውስጥ ዋርካዋ ታየቻቸው፤ የአሮሚያ ዋርካ፤ ዋርካዋ በጸጥታ ቆማለች። ሆርዶፋና ሃዊኒ ዋርካዋ ስር ደረሱ፤ ፋኖሳቸውን በቅርንጫፍ ላይ ሲያንጠለጥሉት አካባቢው ወገግ አለ” (“They see the Oak tree in the dark. It is the Oak tree of Oromiya. The Oak tree stands in silence. Hordofa and Hawini arrived under the Oak tree. When they hang the lamp on its branch, the surrounding area becomes bright”). The Oak “Oda” is a symbol of the Oromo people. The plateau might represent the region or the land.

Furthermore, the mythic river, Burqa, is likely to represent the Oromo people (for it is common in the Ethiopian context to represent people from same area by a river or ‘ጅረት’⁸). The river will again flow naturally on its course, on the surface of the earth, when the Oromo people use their right to self-determination. We remember from the preceding section that the river has flown underground since Menelik’s ‘invasion’

⁷ The Oromo character and member of the OPDO, Hawini, together with Wordofa went to the hill, named after the Burqa Oroma patriot, Aba Boku for he was killed by the army of Menelik II there, to find the note that Anoli left her in the underground while he was encircled by the government army. They hang the lamp on the Oak tree which is the symbol of the Oromo people in order to get light so that they can easily find the place and dig out the note.

⁸ According to the Dictionary of Amharic, prepared by Ethiopian Languages Study and Research Center, ጅረት (jirät is synonym with ወንዝ (a river). and የወንዝ ልጅ (Yäwäniz lij) means የአካባቢ ልጅ/የአገር ልጅ (yakababi lij/yagär lij) (people of the same river or the same village, country).

of the land of the Oromos. The representation of the Oromo people with the River Burqa is reflected in Anole's speech (2000, p. 83): “ቡርቃ ማለት እናንተ ናችሁ! ዝም ያላችሁትም ወንዙ ሳይሆን እናንተ ናችሁ! የኦሮሞን ምድር የሚያጥለቀልቀው የቡርቃ ወንዝ ትንቢት ለናንተ የተነገረ ምሳሌ ነው” (“You are the one who is represented by means of the River Burqa. It is not the River Burqa which is silent; you are the ones who are silent. The prophecy of the Burqa River that overflows the Oromo land is a symbolic story told for you”).

The plateau of Burqa being the place where Abba Dulla had been assassinated by the people of Menelik II, the associations of “the silence of Burqa” with the silence of the Oromo people, and the rise of the conflict after a century to the myth of the River Burqa in the novel might strength the interpretation of River Burqa as the symbolic representation of the different generations of the Oromo people. Hawini is also heard when saying that “የኦሮሞ ህዝብ እንደ ደራሽ ወንዝ ከየጎጆው ወጥቶ አገር ምድሩን በቁጣ ያናውጥ ዘንድ እመኛለሁ” (“I wish the Oromo people run a riot like flash (river) flood in all the Oromo land in anger” symbolizing a riot of the Oromo people with flash flood) (2000, p. 458).

The epilogue's last summary of the novel also serves as a symbolic depiction of the editorial narrator's (and possibly the author's) emotions ⁹ (2000, p. 461):

ይህንኑ እያዘምኩ አዲ-ሳባ ገባሁ። ማለዳ ነበር። በመንጋት ላይ ያለ ሰንበት ማለዳ። የምስራቅ ሰማይ ወለል ብሎ ታየኝ። አያለሁ። ይታየኛል። የፀሀይቱ መውጫ ይታየኛል። አስፈሪና ከባድ የተፈጥሮ የንጋት ቀለም ሰማዩን አጅጎርጉሮታል። ጨፍጋጋ ማለዳ። ተስፋ ቢስ ንጋት። አዎን! ሰማዩ የአህያ ሆድ መስሎአል። የወደል አህያ ሆድ።

I arrived in Addis Ababa when dawn breaks. It is very early in the morning; just a holiday dawn. I see the sky in the east. I can see it. I can see the sunrise. Frightening and dangerous color of the dawn has adverse streaks on the natural color of the sky. It was

⁹ The novel has prologue and endlogue. In the prologue we have been told that the author, a journalist, went to Asmara to make an interview for some officials of Asmara. There he was introduced to Hawini the female Oromo character. He came to write the story based on the information he gets from her. She told him about Anoli and herself. He made the closing description in the epilogue when he land in Addis Ababa Airport from Asmara.

unpleasant dawn! Hopeless dawn! Yes the sky looks like “the color of the skin of a donkey’s abdomen”¹⁰

Anoli is not also confident in the EPRDF’s determination to bring about equality and democracy in the country and for the Oromo people. Because of this, he has a plan to start an armed struggle. It is this situation and feelings of the editorial narrator that are revealed by the symbolic description of the dawn.

The issue of Ethiopian nationalism is one of the most controversial agenda of the period. The EPRDF promotes ethnic federalism. According to EPRDF, it is through the love and respect of the different ethnic groups that Ethiopian nationalism can be realized. First, the right to self-determination of the different ethnic groups is given much importance. Many people, especially those who promote Ethiopian nationalism, are suspicious of this ethnic policy of the EPRDF because some of the ethnic groups have founded their own political organizations; even some others have tried to expel people who do not belong to their ethnic groups. Many consider this situation as a treat to Ethiopian nationalism. This is one of the reasons why some national parties are founded. They are meant for protecting Ethiopian nationalism and unity. In relation to ethnic policy, the Oromo character, Hawini, in *Yäburqa Zimäta* says the following (2000, p. 294):

በተለይም በብሄር መደራጀት የፈጠረው ስጋትና ውዥንብር ማንኛውም ዜጋ ጆሮውን አንቅቶ የሚከሰተውን እንዲያዳምጥ አድርጎታል። ከዚህ ቀደም እምብዛም በግልጽ ያልተሰሙ ያልተለመዱ ስሜቶች በአደባባይ ጸሀይ ሞቁ። የአማራነት፣ የኦሮሞነት ... የትግራይነት ... የወላይታነት ... ስሜቶች እንደሰደዱ እሳት ይያያዙ ጀመር።

The doubt that results from the organization of people based on ethnic background makes every citizen to keenly follow things. Different sentiments which were not openly seen or heard in the past are revealed. The feelings of Amhara, Oromo, Wolayta and other tribalism begin to grow.

The character, Kumsa, of the OPDO, in his dialogue with Anoli, regarding ethnicity, explains that if the right of the Oromo people to self-administration is respected, they will become the beneficiaries of the economy and they will develop their language and culture. If that is so,

¹⁰ “The color of the skin of a donkey’s abdomen” likely means a gray sky.

there is no reason for secession of the Oromo people from the other ethnic groups (2000, p. 302). The character Hawini also utters (2000, p. 460):

የአሮሚያ ልጆች በአንድ ዋርካ ዛፍ ስር መሰባሰብ የሚችሉበት ዕለት ይናፍቀኛል። ከዚያም ባሻገር ኢትዮጵያዊነት እንዲጠነክርና እንዲያብብ ከልብ እመኛለሁ። ይህን እለት ዘወትር በተስፋ ነው የምጠብቀው።

I always want to see the day the Oromo people will be able to gather under an oak tree. Moreover, I heartily wish the Ethiopian nationalism to be strong and blossom. I have always longed to see this day.

Hawini expressed her desire for Ethiopian nationalism and Oromo tribalism to become true in the nation, although it is clear from her words that she doubts their viability: “ይህ ምኞቴ እንደ ቡርቃ ዝምታ ተረት እየሆነ ሲሄድ ሳይ ግን ልቤ ይደማል” (“My heart bleeds when I see my wish becoming a myth like the silence of Burqa”) (2000, p. 460).

In *Yäburqa Zimīta*, contempt, suspicion and vengeance among different ethnic groups, especially between Amhara and Oromo, were arguably passed to the younger generation instead of maintaining unity. For instance, the Oromo youth are made to recognize their past as a period of suppression and colonization and they could be instigated to fight for supremacy. The novel, *Yäburqa Zimīta*, further disrespected authors like Kidane Wold Kifle, the writer of *a Dictionary of Amharic*, and Abba Bahri, the writer of *Zena Galla*, and the religious book *Raiyā Mariyam* for “the explanations they gave” for the word “Galla.” This might approve the New Historicism’s belief that the context in which reading takes place has its own significance in our understanding of a text. The author and its literary text could also be influenced by the context in which the literature is produced and consumed (Tyson, 2006, p. 294 – 295). In this regard, the word ‘Galla’, both in writing and oral discourses, has been considered derogatory especially after the 1974 Revolution. Today the use of the word in most discourses can be considered as an insult. Otherwise, *Zena Galla* and *Raiyā Mariyam* were written before century; and the dictionary was written before six or seven decades. Similarly, the word, *näfit’äña* as the ruling party sometimes uses it for referring to Amhara political organizations is a derogatory word considered as an insult. The words ‘Galla’ and ‘näfit’äña’ further carried some form of racial and political ideologies connotations about the respective ethnic groups.

The Politics of Ethnicity, Unity and the Historic Past in *Dertogada* and *Ramatohara*

Ethnicity is not given a significant space in all of Yismaeke's novels, except in some scenes in *Ramatohara* which touched upon the subject in different pages, for instance, in the scenes described in Woldehiwot's diary about the wall writings of sex, religion and race (2010, p. 143). Woldehiwot wrote in his diary that students wrote on the walls of the latrines on issues of race, next to religion and sex. He further wrote that the issues of religion and race are not limited on the walls of the latrines. They are the main topical discussion points of the students' even outside the latrines. He further pointed out that no one is interested in talking about wisdom, philosophy, and history. Regarding religion and race, his diary reads as follows (2002:143):

ከፍተኛው ወሬ ስለወሲብ ነው። ቀጥሎ የሃይማኖት ጉዳይ ነው። የዘር ጉዳይም የጸና ነው። በሃይማኖት የተከፋፈለው በዘር አንድ ሆኖ ይገኛል። በዘር የተከፋፈለው በሃይማኖት አንድ ይሆናል። በሃይማኖታቸው ያገሉሃል። እሱን ስትሸሽ ደግሞ በዘር ደሞ ያገሉሃል። የዚህ ትውልድ ሽቀን ተራግፎ አያልቅም።

The hot issue in the campus is sex. Next issue to sex is religion. Issue of race is also a series problem. Those who are different in religion form unity in race. Those who are different in race form unity in religion. They alienate you from their religion group. When you are trying to protect that they will alienate you by your race. The problem of this generation is endless.

Besides, the dialogues between Miraj and Sipara touch upon problems of ethnicity, as shown in Miraj's discourse (2009, p. 160):

በዚህ ወቅት ተበደልኩ የማይል ብሄር እንደሌለ ነው የምነግርኝ። ምን ተበደልክ ስትይው ግን አጥጋቢ መልስ የለውም። ጭሰኛ ነበርኩ ይልሻል። ጭሰኝነት የኢትዮጵያ ታሪክ ብቻ አይደለም። ወሳደርነት የኛ ብቻ አልነበረም። በእርግጥ አሁን ማንም ጭሰኛ አይባልም። ነገር ግን አጫጫሽ ተደርጓል። እርግጥ የታሪክ እንጨት ማግዶ እፍ እያለ ሲጨናበስ ሌላ ነገር በጀርባ ይጫጫሳል።

At this particular time, I tell you that there is no any ethnic group that does not say 'we are mistreated'; and if you ask them why they think so, they have no good answer to tell you. In fact, they say that they were tenants. However, the tenancy was not the experience of the Ethiopians only. Proletarianism was not also the experience of Ethiopia only, though there is no tenant today.

However, everyone has been made a fire maker. When they are trying to make a fire from the wet woods of history, other things are burnt secretly in the underground.

As reflected by the character Miraj, the ethnic groups complain about having suffered inequality or domination, with no strong justification; they are simply pushed by ethnic political parties or fronts. This can be realized from the last two closing sentences of the above quotation from the utterance of Miraj: Who is the responsible body that instigates ethnic groups to “make a fire from the wet woods of history”? What does the phrase “making fire from the wet woods of history” symbolize? Who burns another thing when the ethnic groups are already burning the wet wood of history? What does the other thing that the instigators smoke in the underground? Miraj might suspect that these groups are writing new history that might help them for their politics (for instance like the view that the Ethiopian history is 100 years old taking into account only the modern form given by Emperor Menelik II, instead of the 3000 years old of Ethiopia (Teshale, 1995, p. Xii). These deconstructed meanings might show the suspicion of the character, Miraj, towards the ruling party, EPRDF. The deconstruction of the language also shows the power of words in revealing different ideologies and interpretations regarding the ethnic politics. In connection with the power of words in revealing ideology, Fairclough (1992, p. 87), as cited by Jørgensen and Phillips (2002, p. 75), explains that “discourses can be more or less ideological the ideological discourses being those that contribute to the maintenance and transformation of power relations”.

In *Ramatohara*, the characters drawn from are from different ethnic groups (and religious backgrounds) such as Tigre, Amhara, Oromo, and Muslim and Christian. For instance, Shagiz is from Bonga. Colonel Aligaz is from Adwa, Tigray, though he grew up in Bale, Oromia. Mariye and his father Wako are from Illibabur, Oromia. Melat and Siraj Ahmed Siraj (at least by his name) are Muslims, while Abba Finhas and his daughter Sipara are Jews. Irrespective of their differences in religion and ethnicity, the characters in the novel are working for one objective, that is, the development of a research and science centre. If there is a difference, that difference is a matter of an outlook rather than ethnicity and race. For instance, Diwola and Feqo are Ethiopians who work against Ramatohara group simply for the sake of wealth.

In addition, the novel *Dertogada* promotes Ethiopian nationalism. But that nationalism and unity are supposed to come through development. According to Abba Jenberu, one of the founders of the organization of

Dertogada and Ramatohara, one of the objectives of the organizations is to bring development throughout the country in science and research. One of the means to facilitate the development and the connection of people is the construction of cross-country railroads. This then helps to bring unity among the people of Ethiopia without any interference of the politics. But Abba Jenberu explains that the Ethiopian leaders do not want such kinds of constructions and developments because the railroads might facilitate the path for rebels who struggle to overthrow governments. This is reflected in the following words of the character (2009, p. 196 – 197):

የኢትዮጵያ መሪዎች ራሳቸውን ወንበሩ ላይ ለማቆየት ... ለፖለቲካ ... ለስብሰባ ... ለፕሮጋንዳ መንገዥ ... ለካድሬ ኮሬያ እንኳ የሚያወጡት ገንዘብ በሀገሪቷ ሙሉ የባቡር ሃዲዶችን ለመዘርጋት ቢያውሉት እስከ አሁን ሀገሪቷ በድህነት አትማቅቅም ነበር። ይህን ማድረግ ግን አይፈልጉም፤ ... መንገዶች ከበዙም መንግስትን ለመገልበጥ እሚሞክር ማንኛውም ሀይል በቀላሉ ሊሳካለት ስለሚችል። መሪዎቻችን እነማንም ይሁኑ እነማን እኛ በግላችን በየትኛውም ጊዜ በየትኛውም ፈተና ውስጥ ሆነን ሀገራችንን መገንባት አለብን። እስከመቼ ጥሩ መሪ እንጠብቃለን። ... የባቡር ሃዲዳም የሃገራችን አንድነትና ህልውና ደም መዘዋወሪያ የደም ስር ይሆናል። እስኪ በከተሞች ውስጥ የምድር ውስጥ የኤሌትሪክ ባቡሮች ሲወገጩ ... በምድር ላይ ደግሞ አገር አቋራጭ ተወንጫፊ ባቡሮች በባቡር ሃዲዶች ላይ በተባረቡና በተበሉ ተራሮች ውስጥ እያቆራረጡ ሽው እልም ሲሉ የሚመጣውን ብልጽግና አስብ። ይታይህ የሚኖረው አንድነት! ይታይህ ያኔ የሚኖረው መፈቃቀር ... ይታይህ ያኔ የሚፈጠረው መቀራረብ ... ይታይህ የተሰባበረው የኢትዮጵያ የአንድነት መንፈስ ሲጠገን ... ይህ ነው እውናዊ አንድነት።

Ethiopia might not stay at the level of poverty to date if the Ethiopian leaders used the money they spent for propaganda, politics, conference and cape of cadres in construction of railroads. However, they don't want to do this because if cross regional railroads are built, it will be easy for any armed opponent political groups to overthrow any government in power. Whoever our leaders are, we must build our country in any difficult situation. How long do we wait for good leaders? ... The railroad will be the cell and blood vessel of our unity and existence. Imagine our cities when electric trains are driven fast in the underground railroads...Imagine the development when trans-regional trains are driven fast on the ground and through tunnels

of mountains. Imagine the unity that will grow out of this development. **Imagine the love that we will have. Imagine the close relationship that will be formed among the people... and how the broken bones of unity of Ethiopia will be repaired... This will be the real unity (Emphasis mine).**

Dertogada, unlike *Yäburqa Zimäta*, realizes the Emperors, Menelik II and Tewodros, as heroes, symbols of unity and development. This is reflected in different contexts of the novel. For instance, the photographs of the two Emperors have been mounted on the walls of the meeting hall of the Dertogada (2009, p. 183): “ባዳራሹ ግድግዳ ዙሪያ ... ያጼ ቴዎድሮስና ያጼ ሚኒሊክ ትላልቅ ስዕሎች ግድግዳው ላይ ተሰቅለዋል” (“The photographs of Emperors Tewodros and Minilik are mounted on the walls of the auditorium”). In another context, when a former one-legged war-victim soldier begs for money in the names of Menigestu, Tewodros and Menilik, someone promised him one Birr if he begs in the name of the Prime Minister. The beggar then replied to him saying, “Clean your ass with it. I have another person in whose name I can beg” (“ቁጥህን ጥረግበት...በስሙ የምለምንበት ሰው መች አጣሁ”) (2009, p. 125) and then shows him the photograph of Tewodros and begs in his name by saying:

ስለአጤ ቴዎድሮስ...ስላንድ ለናቱ...ስለ ሽህ ጠላቱ... ከእንግሊዝ በመድፍ ከሱዳን በጊንጥ ተዋግቶ ስለ ሰንደቃችን ራሱን ስለ ሰጠው ስላንድ ለናቱ .. ስለሽህ ጠላቱ.

In the name of Emperor Tewodros...Who was single for the family... and who had many enemies...who dedicated his life fighting with British in canon and with Sudan in “scorpion” for the well-being of our flag.

“Dertogada” and “Ramatohara”, according to the novels, are national organizations that are immune from race, religion, and ethnicity. Their common objective is to lay the foundations of Ethiopian nationalism and civilization on the basis of development throughout the country. At the same time they are programs launched for the restoration of Ethiopia’s former story. Therefore, every Ethiopian scientist is welcome to Dertogada and Ramatohara irrespective of his/her ethnicity, race and religion. In this regard, the character Colonel Fisseha gives an explanation in the following way (2009, p. 250):

ይህች ሀገር ... እናት ሀገር ኢትዮጵያ የምንላት ለጥቂቶች አንገቶች ለብዙዎቻችን ደግሞ የእንጀራ እናት ሆናለች። ኢትዮጵያን ለኢትዮጵያውያን መመለስ የሚቻለው በዴሮቶጋዳ ነው። ዴሮቶጋዳ

ለጥቂቶች ብቻ የሚያደገድግ ድርጅት አይደለም። ለየትኛውም ... ሃይማኖት ዘር ጎሳ የፖለቲካ ድርጅት ጥበቃ ለማድረግ የተቆዋቋመ ድርጅት አይደለም። ማንኛውንም ኢትዮጵያዊ በአመለካከቱ ምክንያት በጠላትነት አይፈርድም። የኢትዮጵያን ችግር ሳይንስ እንጂ ፕሮፓጋንዳ አይፈታውም። ዴርቶጋዳ ኢትዮጵያን በሳይንስ ወደ ቀደመ ክብሯ ይመልሳታል።

This country... which we call Motherland Ethiopia has already become a good mother for a few people and yet a step mother (cruel) for many of us. It is possible to make Ethiopia for all the Ethiopians through Dertogada. Dertogada is neither an organization that works for few individuals nor an organization founded for the benefit of any specific religion, race, ethnic group or political organization. No Ethiopian national is categorized as an enemy because of his/her outlook. The problems of Ethiopia must get solution in science rather than in propaganda. Dertogada restores Ethiopia to its former story and civilization.

Even though the Colonel speaks of the organization’s being immune from race, ethnicity and religion, its Dertogada’s emblem is a special cross designed in the shape of the Amharic letter “ቶ” which is read as “to” as in ‘ton’ (2009, p. 251): “የኢትዮጵያ ዳግም ትንሳኤና ህዳሴ ምልክትም በ “ቶ” ቅርጽ የተሰራው ይህ ልዩ መስቀል ነው” (“The symbol for the Resurrection and Renaissance of Ethiopia is this special cross made in the design of the Amharic letter “ቶ”). The question is: Why does the emblem of the non-religious organization become cross-shaped while the characters are followers of the Orthodox Christianity, Judaism, Islam and some are non-religious persons? One of the reasons might be that the organizations Dertogada and Ramatohara are founded in the monasteries and run by some monks. Anyway, this cross-shaped emblem seems contradictory to the objectives both organizations which were proclaimed to be free from religious implications.

As mentioned previously, one of the issues of *Dertogada* and *Ramatohara* is showing the need for calling upon the intellectual Ethiopian Diaspora to join the organizations which work for the development of the country and expand research and science centres. To this end, many characters, engineer Gera, Dr. Jangida, Dr. Miraj, Colonel Fisseha and other specialists who were working in American, Japanese, Iranian, Indian and Korean research institutes, satellite stations and air forces, came back to Ethiopia and joined Dertogada. One of the coordinators of this job is Engineer Shagiz. The objective of the real-life

scientist character, Shagiz, is to bring unity among the people and help Ethiopia grow using its skilled people and natural resources. Shagiz's ambition is to come to his home country and help the Ethiopians in his profession. In connection with this, the real Engineer Qitaw¹¹ made a speech in reality that "Ethiopia will develop properly only if the current government implements an economic program by inviting and using the skilled Ethiopians from all over the world; otherwise, there cannot be any substantial development in the country" (International Organization for Migration (Geneva), October 1995).

Dertogada and *Ramatohara* promoted the unity of Ethiopians, and the respect for different ethnicities, religions and historical figures (like the Emperors Tewodros II and Menelik II, the patriot Abdisa Aga (Oromo), the martyr Abune Petros (Oromo), and the writer Tsegaye Gebre Medhin (Oromo). The novels further provoked the need for erecting statues for such kinds of historical figures rather than for guerrilla fighters of one particular political group that did not represent the whole people of Ethiopia. For the two novels, the statue of guerrilla fighters would provoke anger and vengeance rather than love and respect because it was Ethiopian children who lost their lives in the war rather than soldiers of one particular ethnic or political group. The novels further promoted unity through the development of civilization, science and research. That is, unity would come when economic, political and human developments become real, and cross-national roads and railways are constructed and commerce is expanded. At that time, the novels noted that, the different ethnic groups will be united without any political interference.

Dertogada and *Ramatohara* are optimistic about the future. The characters are trying to work for the development of the country. They established the science and research organizations that could work for the sustainable development of the country. The novels advocated unity of the different ethnic groups of Ethiopia through development.

Conclusion

The preceding discussion highlights that the contemporary Amharic novels analyzed in this study reflect various political themes including

¹¹ The real Kitaw Edjigu was a space scientist and an engineer in NASA. He was one of the founders of Ethiopian National United Front to overthrow the EPRDF in Guerilla warfare. His life experience is reflected in the interviews he made in different Amharic Journals, "itop", no. 045/95, March, 2003; Lisanä Hüzib, Vol. 1, No.1, 2004.

ethnicity, unity, and historical narratives. However, it is important to note that these novels differ in their representations of these themes. *Yäburqa Zimīta* advocates for ethnic politics, while *Dertogada* and *Ramatohara* condemn it. Nevertheless, this does not imply that these novels disrespect the rights of different ethnic groups. In *Yäburqa Zimīta*, the primacy of ethnic groups' rights, including the right to secession, takes precedence over the question of national identity. Conversely, *Dertogada* and *Ramatohara* promote unity through development. These novels value Emperor Tewodros and Emperor Menelik II as symbols of the country, whereas *Yäburqa Zimīta* specifically criticizes Emperor Menelik II as a colonizer of the Oromo people. Additionally, *Dertogada* and *Ramatohara* pay tribute to prominent figures from the Oromo tribe, such as Petros, Abdissa, and Tsegaye, who have historical and popular significance in Ethiopia.

Based on these explanations, it can be inferred that these novels reflect the different political philosophies of the time. Furthermore, they have the potential to influence and shape contemporary politics. It is evident that literature and politics are interrelated, as observed in the selected novels. The authors play significant roles in shaping both politics and society, using their works to highlight societal issues and propose solutions. Therefore, literature serves not only as a source of entertainment but also as a medium for propaganda, ideology, and political discourse.

In conclusion, the analysis of these selected novels confirms the mutual influence between literature and politics in the country. The authors' works serve as platforms for expressing political ideologies and shaping public opinion. Literature, therefore, holds the power to not only entertain but also to convey messages, ideologies, and political perspectives to society.

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